

Progesterone shots (17P) to prevent another premature birth



Premature birth is birth that happens too early, before 37 weeks of pregnancy. Premature babies may need to stay in the hospital longer or may have more health problems than babies born full term. Full term means your baby is born between 39 weeks and 40 weeks, 6 days of pregnancy.

Progesterone shots may help prevent premature birth for some women. Talk to your provider to see if progesterone shots are right for you.

What is progesterone?

Progesterone is a hormone. Hormones are chemicals made by the body.

Progesterone plays a key role during pregnancy. In early pregnancy, it helps your uterus (womb) grow and keeps it from having contractions. If you have contractions in early pregnancy, they may lead to miscarriage. This is the death of a baby in the womb before 20 weeks of pregnancy.

In later pregnancy, progesterone helps your breasts get ready to make breast milk. It also helps your lungs work harder to give oxygen to your growing baby.

What are progesterone shots?

Progesterone shots are a kind of progesterone called 17 alpha-hydroxyprogesterone caproate (also called 17P). The shots may help prevent premature birth if **both** of these describe you:

1. You had a spontaneous premature birth before when you were pregnant with just one baby. Spontaneous means labor began on its own, without drugs or other methods. Or the sac around your baby broke early, causing labor.
2. You're pregnant with just one baby.

If both of these describe you, your provider may prescribe progesterone shots. You begin the shots between 16 and 24 weeks of pregnancy, and you get a shot each week until 37 weeks.

The shots are available in two ways:

1. As a brand-name drug called Makena®
2. Prepared (also called compounded) at special pharmacies. You can get this kind of shot only if you have certain health conditions, like an allergy to something in Makena.

Insurance companies and state Medicaid programs may help pay for the shots.

Even if you get progesterone shots, they don't always work to prevent another premature birth. They don't reduce your chances of giving birth early if you're pregnant with multiples (twins, triplets or more). And they don't reduce your chances of giving birth early if your previous premature birth wasn't spontaneous.

Are there side effects to the shots?

You may have some discomfort at the injection site (the place on your body where you get the shot). Research on babies of women who took the shots shows no increase in birth defects or developmental problems in the first 4 years of life. More studies are being done to follow up on both mothers and babies. Talk to your provider about safety and side effects of progesterone shots.

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